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SUBJECT: BRV TIGHTENS THE VISA SCREWS ON FOREIGN JOURNALISTS

Classified By: PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER BEN ZIFF, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

1.(C) An increasing number of resident American and foreign journalists are reporting to us that the BRV is delaying or not issuing appropriate visas to allow them to work legally in Venezuela. This is a change from past practice, given that as recently as two years ago Miraflores Palace had an office dedicated to supporting credentials and visas for foreign journalists. With the evaporation of such BRV support - and, indeed, overt regime hostility to journalists of any stripe - it is clear that the BRV is using visas as yet another control mechanism over the foreign press in Venezuela.

12. (C) Most foreign journalists now enter the country on a tourist visa - valid only for 90 days, or by getting a difficult to acquire business visa valid for one year. Neither visa category covers journalism, and tourists are not allowed to even rent office space. To be legal, reporters are required to obtain a "legal transient resident" visa, a process which requires hiring a lawyer, incorporating a company in Venezuela, getting hired by said company, and then applying for the visa, which is then issued at the Venezuelan embassy or consulate from the applicant's country of origin. In practice, almost no foreign journalists can navigate these bureaucratic obstacles. It took the New York Times almost a year - and lots of money - to complete this onerous process, which was ultimately successful only through the intervention of Ministry-level contacts.

13. (C) Most U.S. journalists work and live in Venezuela in technical violation of the law, and are resigned to having their visas canceled should their reporting anger the regime. All our journalistic contacts report increased scrutiny by immigration authorities, and even Venezuelan journalists tell us they are now required to complete a special "journalist" form upon returning from abroad. BRV hostility to the free press is unquestionably increasing, and making it almost impossible for foreign journalists to acquire appropriate visas is but the latest expression of that animus.

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